

## WESLEY UNITING CHURCH, CANBERRA

SUNDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2007 – 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY IN LENT

### SERMON

#### Readings:

Deuteronomy 26: 1 – 11

Psalm 91: 1 – 2; 9 – 16

Romans 10: 8b – 13

Luke 4: 1 – 13

The Luke passage deals with the temptation of Jesus. The only other place where the temptations are dealt with in detail, is in the gospel of Matthew (Matt 4:1-ff). There is a brief mention in Mark and no mention in John.

What are the temptations about? Why is Jesus tempted? To understand this, we have to realise that the temptations come at the beginning of the gospel. They occur immediately after Jesus has been baptised in the Jordan by John. He is baptised to show that he is in solidarity with the human race and is, like the human race, coming to God with repentance.

As Israel repents with the coming of the Messiah, so Jesus identifies with the human race and joins in that common repentance. It is incarnational, solidarity with us.

The Hebrew practise of Baptism was a sign of repentance, and in the case of John's baptism, a preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus is baptised he shows himself in solidarity with the Jews and with the human race by joining in their baptism. But he also acts on behalf of the human race, because he comes to act on its behalf.

Then, the Spirit of God leads him out into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. Is this just to show that he is a superman? Totally superhuman, incapable of doing wrong?

#### Docetism

So he goes out to be tempted. The spirit of God takes him out to be tempted. Often the desert is seen as a place of purity. But here, in this passage, it is the place of evil. Two parts of the world are seen as a place of evil, the sea and the desert. Here, the powers of evil come upon him in the desert. We do not believe in a personalised devil, we can believe in forces of evil. He is tempted three times. The order of the temptations vary between Matthew and Luke, but we follow Luke.

The **first temptation** is that he has been fasting for forty days, and the devil says to him, if you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread. And Jesus replies to each of the three temptations by quoting Deuteronomy. First of all, at the end of the first temptation, he quotes Deut 8:3 "It is written one does not live by bread alone." Now, what does this mean? Every other human being after fasting for forty days and fasting is a sign also of repentance, it fits in with his baptism, it is a sign of humiliation, which is what Lent is.

Every other human being would feed himself, or be sorely tempted to!

But Jesus resists it, because he has to continue in repentance in solidarity with the human race. He represents the human race in its repentance. Now in John 4:34- after the disciples say to him "Rabbi, eat" he says "my meat is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish my work." He does not want to move out of being in solidarity with the human race. They are in a state of repentance and so he is also in a state of repentance.

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The **second temptation** is that the devil offers him all the kingdoms of the world. “To you I will give there glory and authority. Worship me and it will all be yours.” He replies Deut 6:13. “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.” The devil only asks him just to recognise the ultimate power of evil. In other words, you can use God’s action in the world, so long as you recognise that evil will triumph. So they use the symbols of the church. Under no circumstances must the powers of evil be worshipped. ....

In the **third and final temptation**, the devil takes him to the pinnacle of the temple and he says “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down and the angel will prevent you from getting hurt.” And he quotes from Psalm 91, v 10-11. Jesus replies by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 “Do not put the Lord to the test.” Now here the Devil appears as a pious person, who actually quotes the psalms. Clever. But, here the temptation is not to follow the will of God, but rather to worship your own religious experience. Throw yourself off the temple. Any tele-evangelist would love this, but Christ, does not want anyone to see **his** miraculous activity, but through him to see God. He wishes to point to God.

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Now Lent is a time where Christians deny themselves and follow Christ, before his passion. Therefore they seek to understand how Christ was tempted and then apply that to themselves. So let’s look at the three temptations. **First**, the first temptation is to identify with Christ and not to seek a quick solution. The **second one**, is not to compromise following Christ with the demands of an evil world. And the **third one** is not to worship religious experience as if religious experience as if religious experience takes the place of God that is ultimately pointing at yourself. Christ does not even point to himself.

**First**, the church and individuals are not called to success, but to faithfulness to God. Reliance on sociology and statistics can be the devil. When the NCLS tells us things, we are tempted not to be faithful to the gospel, but to be successful but to be faithful.

**Second**, the idea of compromising with the forces of evil is very tempting for the church. We can avoid critiquing society if that is inconvenient for us.

And **thirdly**, we are tempted to point to our own churches experience rather than to God as the source of authority.

At the end of the temptations, the devil leaves him “until and opportune time” the *kairos*, a critical time. This points forward to Gethsemane and the passion. There again the devil will come to him. In Mel Gibson’s film we see the devil coming, but in Luke it is not there. The Temptations are the same as Gethsemane. He has to go the way of the cross, he has to do the will of God.

Lent is not the Christian equivalent of joining a fitness club!  
In all temptations, Christ rejects going in for a kind of self-edification.